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Ethics in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: A Qualitative Directed Content Analysis

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Abstract

Background: Ethics in teaching and learning research is a core issue that should be scientifically handled to ensure studies are fair, transparent, and trustworthy. The conceptual scope of ethics in educational scholarship is still quite vague, especially when it comes to locating, understanding, and applying moral principles in different institutional and disciplinary contexts.

Methods: This qualitative research utilized a directed content analysis strategy. The participants were educational scholarship experts from Iran's medical sciences universities, selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using directed content analysis.

Results: There were 17 participants (ten females and seven males). In this study, the retrieved codes originated from meaning units, which were then grouped into subcategories based on the predetermined categories. The analysis resulted in 402 initial codes, 26 subcategories, and ten major categories. The latter includes "Ethical Commitment", "Ethical Scholarly Reflection", "Discipline Oriented Scholarly Ethical Commitment", "Ethical Scholarly Commitment to Dynamic Education", "Ethical and Accountable Critical Inquiry", "Ethical Knowledge Dissemination", "Contextual Responsibility", "Analytical Constructive Ethical Critique", "Ethical Commitment to Learning", and "Ethical Fairness in Scholarly Professional Practice". They serve as the essential categories because of their high occurrence and strong correlation to the research objectives.

Conclusion: The SoTL characteristics are underpinned by ethical values that shape educators' responsibilities toward learners, colleagues, institutions, and society. In this regard, this study contributes to the SoTL literature by providing an ethical interpretation of the established characteristics of SoTL through a directed qualitative content analysis. Using the framework of Mirhosseini et al. (2018) as the initial coding matrix, the analysis moved beyond describing SoTL characteristics to uncover the ethical meanings embedded within them. Without consideration of ethical principles, SoTL would, in practice, lack the legitimacy required to exert a meaningful impact on educational systems and the improvement of student learning.

Keywords: Ethical Commitment, Ethical Knowledge Dissemination, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, SoTL

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Introduction

In the last two decades, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has grown significantly as a systematic, evidence-based approach to examining and improving teaching methods and enhancing student learning outcomes. This field helps improve the quality of education through rigorous scientific research, critical reflection, and public dissemination of findings (1).

Academic leaders have recognized the value of SoTL in fostering professionalism, cultural inclusivity, critical thinking, and educational innovation, particularly in areas such as medical humanities that integrate ethics, arts, and humanities with health professions education (2). Also, in

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Key Messages:

↑What is "already known" in this topic:

Ethical principles are fundamental to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and ensure integrity, transparency, and accountability in educational research. However, the conceptualization and practical application of ethics in SoTL remain insufficiently defined across different educational contexts.

→What this article adds:

This study identifies key ethical dimensions of SoTL based on expert perspectives in Iranian medical universities and proposes a structured understanding of ethical commitments guiding scholarly teaching and learning practices.

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other disciplines, SoTL has gained prominence and links teaching and research, improves the quality of learning, professional excellence, and solving practical problems (3). Ethical challenges specific to SoTL often arise from the dual role of faculty as educators and researchers, which creates tensions such as power imbalances in student engagement (4).

The field, with its interdisciplinary nature, deals with issues such as constraints, valid informed consent, and maintaining confidentiality (5). While educators in other disciplines, might be capable of managing these dynamics, to protect vulnerable groups such as students, careful ethical scrutiny is required (6). Moreover, to implement SoTL projects in new interdisciplinary fields, faculty members often experience a sense of helplessness and methodological unfamiliarity, making faculty empowerment and organizational support necessary (7).

Despite the strong institutionalization of research ethics in other fields, the ethical challenges specific to SoTL have not been sufficiently conceptualized or systematically explained (8). In this regard, the existing discussions typically approached ethics in SoTL through other related domains such as research ethics, educational ethics, professional ethics, academic integrity, and the responsible conduct of educators. However, they do not adequately account for the distinctive ethical issues that emerge in SoTL practice per se, including dual-role tensions, interdisciplinary differences, and the complexity of enacting ethical principles across diverse institutional and disciplinary contexts (8, 9). Consequently, the conceptual boundaries of ethics in SoTL remain unclear, particularly with regard to identification, interpretation, and application of principles such as transparency and validity in practice (9). Given the rapid expansion of SoTL and its increasing influence on educational policy and practice, this lack of conceptual clarity represents an important gap between available ethical frameworks and the actual ethical demands of the field (10). Therefore, the present study addresses this problem attempts to identifying and explaining the main ethical challenges of SoTL and by advance understanding of ethics in SoTL beyond existing ethical concepts, and through clarification of its distinctive nature, scope, and concerns.

This research adopts the conceptual framework of SoTL proposed by Mirhosseini et al. (2018) (11) according to which, SoTL is characterized by nine integrated defining attributes (Table 1), which frame SoTL as a dynamic, learning-focused process grounded in critical inquiry, transcending a narrow understanding of teaching as a set of instructional practices.

Methods

Study design

This study reports the results of the qualitative part of a sequential- exploratory mixed-method research on ethics in SoTL. The findings of Mirhosseini et al. (2018) were used as the initial coding framework (11).

For the purposes of this research, a directed content analysis approach, utilizing pre-determined categories, was used to clarify, define, and identify the constructs related to ethics in SoTL. This qualitative phase was focused on the analysis of expert interview data. The semi-structured interview transcripts were analyzed via directed content analysis with the aim of clarifying and elaborating the concept of ethics in SoTL and identifying its associated constructs. This analytic approach enabled the organization of data within theoretically informed categories, while remaining open to the emergence of new insights grounded in experts' professional experiences. Although guided by an existing theoretical framework, the analysis integrates SoTL constructs with insights derived from experts' experiences.

Table 1. Categorization Framework Based on the Conceptual Model of Mirhosseini et al. (2018)

Category (Attributes)	Subcategory
Context- oriented	Institution-oriented
	Community-based
	Beneficiary oriented
Disciplinary	Inter-and multi-meta disciplinary
	Theory-oriented
	Knowledge-based
Continuous deep reflection	Reflection: *for
Critique-based	Critique
	Peer—review
	Evaluation (More Formative than summative)
Critical enquiry process	Enquiry
	Inquiry
	The best evidence and virtue-based strategy
Committed engagement in action	Engagement
	Action
	Innovative
	Ethical professional commitment
Shared publicly	Documented
	Disseminated
	Shared Public
Dynamic process	Systematic
	Developmental
	Build up
Learning focused	-

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Identifying the question

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

1 .What is ethics in SoTL from the perspective of experts?

2. What are the characteristics and manifestations of ethics in SoTL from the perspective of experts?

Participants and interviews

Seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted to determine the concept of ethics in SoTL by interviewing study participants who were experienced in the field of SoTL. They were selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. The participants were seven men and ten women aged 35 to 68 years with a work experience of 4 to 28 years (Table 2).

The inclusion criteria include conducting or reviewing SoTL projects at institutional or national levels. Conversely, the exclusion criteria were defined as withdrawal from continued collaboration or a declination of follow-up interviews when required. The study participants included five full professors, six associate professors, and six assistant professors.

Participants were contacted via phone calls or in person to agree on the time and location of interviews. After obtaining written and oral informed consent, the study participants were assured that their demographics would remain confidential. For participants who preferred not to participate in face-to-face interviews, telephone or Skype interviews were conducted as acceptable alternatives. Participants were assured that they could withdraw from or stop the interview at any time.

An interview guide including contact information of the research team, research title, research objectives, research questions, and data collection methods was shared with the study participants.

Sample open-ended interview questions

1. Based on your experience in the field of SoTL, where and how did you observe the role of ethical and professional considerations in your actions or within your team's collaborative processes?

2. What is your understanding of ethical commitment to professional principles during a project? Specifically, how do you believe this commitment contributes to the advancement of individuals, the institution, and disciplinary knowledge, ultimately fostering scholarly development?

The research semi-structured interviews were conducted by one of the research team members (FK) and the research interview guide including nine guided questions was used for the purposes of data gathering. The interviewer recorded all the interviews and transcribed them verbatim. In addition, she documented the participants' nonverbal behaviors and gestures during the interviews, while taking field notes at the same time.

On average, interviews lasted from 25 to 65 minutes. Although an interview guide was used, the order and nature of the questions evolved as data collection progressed, while focusing on open-ended questions throughout the process. Data saturation was reached after the fifteenth interview, as no new information emerged. However, two additional interviews were carried out to confirm saturation (Box 1).

Trustworthiness

The accuracy of this qualitative study was ensured using Lincoln and Guba criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (12, 13).

To ensure credibility, we invested sufficient time in learning from the study participants, and we checked our analytic findings with the participants (member checking). Moreover, the credibility of the categories generated was further enhanced through member checking, in which the initial findings and representative quotes were shared with the participants to confirm that the results accurately reflected their lived experiences with ethics in SoTL.

To support transferability, a detailed explanation of the concept and characteristics of the study participants, as well as a full report of the data collection and analysis process, were provided so that other researchers can apply the results to similar situations and easily follow the steps of this research. Dependability was secured by using a pilot study conducted by the research team members with two faculty members who met the inclusion criteria. Based on their feedback and subsequent discussion among the research team, three interview questions were rephrased to ensure clarity and relevance to the ethical aspects of SoTL. Confirmability was improved by evaluating the data coding process and consulting with qualitative research experts to validate the interview content. To maintain confirmability and reduce researchers' bias during the directed content analysis, the initial coding scheme and subsequent revisions were continuously shared with and audited by two qualitative research experts (external audit), leading to consensus on the final categories.

Data analysis

The concept of ethics in SoTL was clarified through in-

Box 1. Sample Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Based on your experience in the field of SoTL, where and how did you observe the role of ethical and professional considerations in your actions or within your team's collaborative processes?

2. What is your understanding of ethical commitment to professional principles during a project? Specifically, how do you believe this commitment contributes to the advancement of individuals, the institution, and disciplinary knowledge, ultimately fostering scholarly development?

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terviews informed by the interaction of basic definitions and characteristics of SoTL. The interview data were analyzed using directed qualitative content analysis, a qualitative methodological approach that transforms dispersed and diverse data into rich and structured analytical categories (14).

This analysis followed a deductive approach to validate and expand the existing SoTL conceptual framework (Mirhosseini et al.). Accordingly, as an initial step of the data analysis, and to reach immersion, the interview transcript was read and re-read several times; subsequently, an initial list of codes was retrieved, and the related codes were grouped based on the pre-established sub-categories and categories developed through interaction with the predefined main categories of the basic definition of SoTL and its characteristics, which were modified until data saturation (11) (Table 3). The structure of the final coding scheme was repeatedly analyzed and refined. Codes that did not fit within the predetermined categories were assigned to newly created categories/dimension (15) (Tables 1 & 6).

The coding scheme was developed primarily through a deductive approach followed by an inductive approach. Finally, nine deductive categories (based on the initial framework) and one inductive category (emerging from the data) were identified.

Results

The results indicate that experts rely on ethics-based scholarship characteristics in their judgment, designing, and implementation of SoTL activities, demonstrating attention not only to formal guidelines but also to underlying moral values imposed on SoTL as an implicit dimension of its defining characteristics.

Table 4 provides a summary of the directed qualitative content analysis, comparing findings of this study, including the number of interviews, generated codes, subcategories/subdimensions, and main categories/dimensions with the basic definitions of SoTL. This comparison validates the systematic approach employed in this study.

To enhance transparency and rigor of the analysis, representative participant quotations are provided for each category in Table 5.

The main categories of ethics in SoTL

Following the concurrent deductive analysis and as detailed in the methodology section, the tenth dimension, titled 'Ethical Fairness in Scholarly Professional Practice,' was inductively derived, revealing a new category (dimension) and sub-categories (sub-dimensions). These emergent findings are presented as five sub-categories in Table 6, and to distinguish them, they have been highlighted in Table 5 (Section 10). In Table 5, Section 10 – Ethical Fairness in Scholarly Professional Practice.

Ethical fairness in scholarly professional practice

"Justice and transparency in collaboration and the distribution of responsibilities," "Accountability in addressing structural challenges and educational justice," and "Justice and accountability in the allocation and use of resources."

As shown in Table 7, the main categories of ethics in SoTL were derived from the core analysis in line with the study objectives. This table is included to further clarify and expand the definition of ethics in SoTL by summarizing the main categories along with their brief definitions and practical ethical outcomes.

Discussion

At present, ethics in SoTL has not been clearly articulated, and sustained, coherent attention to its dimensions remains limited. Although ethics and commitment are recognized as inherent to the essence of SoTL, they have historically lacked concrete and operational indicators for practical implementation. Clarifying and foregrounding these ethical dimensions based on expert perspectives not only enhances the quality of scholarly and educational processes but also fosters ethical responsibility by translating abstract commitment into applied, practical outcomes.

This study examined ethics in SoTL and demonstrated that ethics, as a core element, plays a fundamental role across all stages of designing, implementing, and judging the SoTL processes. In this regard, morality pertains to individuals' internal judgments and values concerning

Table 2. Participants' Characteristics

Characteristics	Description	Number
Gender	Female	10
	Male	7
Academic Rank	Professor	5
	Associate Professor	6
	Assistant Professor	6
Participants with SoTL Review Experience		17 (100%)
Faculty Experience		2-28 years

Table 3. Examples of Codes, Condensed Meaning Units and Meaning Units

Code	Condensed Meaning Unit	Meaning Unit
Enthusiastic and responsible participation	Committed team engagement and creating motivation for responsible participation	"*Engage the team again… create motivation…*" Participant 2
Responsibility toward others	Acting responsibly toward individuals and the organization	"*I decide to do it responsibly; this is very important. That I think I am responsible toward the time I take from others, the time I take from the organization, the results I publish, and the impact my results have—before doing anything, I think responsibly*." Participant 2

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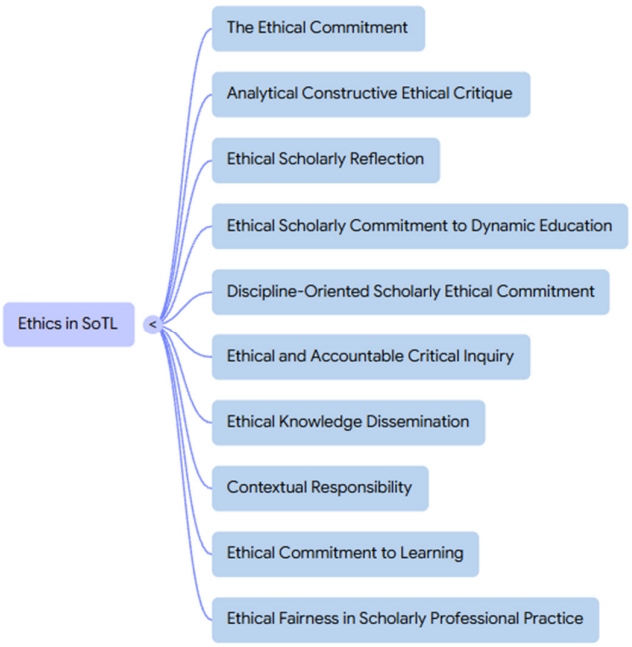


Figure 1. Structural dimensions of ethical practice in SoTL

Table 4. Comparison of the summary of directed qualitative content analysis including number of interviews, codes, subcategories, and main categories in the present study and the basic definition of SoTL selected from Mirhosseini et al. (2018)

	Number of Interviews	Codes	Subcategories	Main Categories
The Basic Definition of SoTL Mirhosseini et al. (2018)	-	-	23	9
The Present Study	17	402	26	10

what is right and wrong, whereas ethics refers to a set of collectively defined rules, norms, and standards that are formulated and enacted within social or professional contexts (16).

The main findings, which were extracted from the content analysis of interviews with 17 experts, highlighted ten main categories (Table 5) that confirm SoTL is not only a technical activity, but also an activity that requires ethical commitment to ensure quality and accountability, which positively affects education and society.

Moreover, the findings indicate that ethics in SoTL goes beyond basic principles such as honesty and transparency and acts as a driving force for improving scholarly processes. For instance, the category of "Ethical Commitment," aligns with Boyer's (1990) framework (17) and considers commitment as a foundation for authentic scholarship. Likewise, the category of "Ethical Scholarly Reflection," while emphasizing unbiased reflection, corresponds with Schoen's (2017) concept of critical reflection (18).

Further analysis revealed a distinction between categories reflecting internalized moral values and those related to professional norms and institutional responsibilities. Categories such as "Ethical Commitment," "Ethical Scholarly Reflection," "Discipline Oriented Scholarly Ethical Commitment", "Ethical and Accountable Critical Inquiry," "Analytical Constructive Ethical Critique", and "Ethical Commitment to Learning" mainly represent personal moral responsibility. In contrast, "Ethical Knowledge Dissemination," "Contextual Responsibility," and "Ethical Fairness in Scholarly Professional Practice" are more closely linked to collective norms and accountability structures. The presence of boundary categories such as "Ethical Scholarly Commitment to Dynamic Education" suggests that ethics in SoTL emerges through the interaction between scholars' internal values and organizational frameworks rather than a simple binary structure.

The findings also highlight ethical tensions within SoTL. For example, "Ethical Scholarly Commitment to Dynamic Education," which encourages innovation, may conflict with "Ethical Fairness in Scholarly Professional Practice," which emphasizes standardization and equitable resource allocation. Rapid innovation may therefore challenge transparency and accountability, reflecting tensions identified in recent SoTL ethics reviews (2025) (19). These findings are consistent with studies by Lee et al. (2025) and Godbold (2021) (20), though the present study examines ethics within interdisciplinary educational processes, and unlike previous studies that emphasize on student perspectives or theoretical discussions, it draws on interviews with experienced SoTL experts and examines ethics within interdisciplinary educational processes.

Compared with prior work emphasizing procedural ethics, such as ethics review, informed consent, and privacy

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Table 5. Final Structure of the Directed Qualitative Content Analysis of Ethics in SoTL with Representative Participant Quotations

Sample Participant Quotations	Sample Extracted Codes	Extracted Subcategories (Subdimensions)	Extracted Main Categories (Dimensions)	Pre- determined Categories
Participant 17: "*I decide to do it responsibly. That's what matters most. It is essential that I think I'm responsible for any person's time I take up, the time I take up for the organization, the results I publish, and the impact of my results. Before taking any measures, I try to think in a socially responsible way*."	Professional conscientiousness- Accountability in actions - Ethical action - Transparency in ethical action - Commitment to professional and responsible practice	Committed and ethically grounded action and interaction within the process	1 The ethical commitment	Committed engagement in action
	Responsibility in the optimal use of resources- Commitment to problem-solving in scholarship-Committed evaluation of the added value of innovation	Ethics-Driven and Responsible Innovation		
	Moral appreciation of even minor contributions - Moral responsibility toward others- Scientific integrity- Moral commitment to honesty, loyalty, and integrity- Commitment to improving the educational process - Commitment to ensuring comprehensive evaluation (including learning outcomes) to enhance educational quality - Ethical/moral use of commercial models - Commitment to practice - Moral respect for others and avoidance of deception	Moral and ethical responsibility in practice		
Participant 12: "*Sometimes criticism is raised, and you gain a point from a reviewer or critic that would never have crossed your mind. Deep down, you also feel a sense of appreciation toward that reviewer, because they have pointed out a part of the work that you should have thought through and designed yourself, but which had been overlooked, either due to limited knowledge or simple inattention*."	Ethical commitment to constructive and fair critique -Consideration of others' conditions and needs in critique - Accountability in selecting appropriate reviewers- Transparency and respect in the critique process - Professional and ethical critique in educational processes -Fair criticism - Transparency in critique	Ethical, professional, and constructive critique in the service of improving learning quality	2 Analytical Constructive Ethical Critique	Critique-based
	Ethical commitment to selecting appropriate peers for review - Accountability in accepting or rejecting critiques - Ethical management of stringent critiques -Transparency and respect in the peer-review process - Transparency in evaluation	Ethical commitment to peer critique in scholarship		
	Committed engagement with peers - Fairness in peer critique- Impartial engagement with peers- Transparency in critique - Commitment to identifying and critically addressing unethical biases to enhance fairness in scholarly evaluation - Commitment to professional review with careful examination of ethical issues- Committed critique - Fair evaluation - Transparent evaluation	Fair, transparent, and impartial judgment and evaluation		
Participant 15: *" In describing the implementation of my work, I focused carefully on the criteria of reflection and feedback. I was honest about the reasons for my failures, discussed what I learned from them, and openly acknowledged that after implementing it once or twice, I encountered challenges and realized what needed to be done in order to succeed.*	Critical reflection for learning from experience - Deliberate reflection for correction and prevention - Responsible reflection for collective benefit - Transparency in sharing the outcomes of reflection - Commitment to self-evaluation and the continuous improvement of teaching methods through reflective practice	Commitment to critical and professional reflection	3 Ethical Scholarly Reflection	Continuous Deep Reflection
	Transparent reflection - Scholarly reflection - Ethical reflection - Honesty in reflection - Honest reflection - Comprehensive and transparent reflection	Honesty and transparency in ethical reflection		

(21), this study focuses on process-based ethical characteristics including commitment, reflection, and fairness. Similar themes appear in studies by Moulton and Tapscott (2025) (6), Shapira-Lishchinsky (2020) (22), and Gillis et al. (2020) (2), as well as earlier discussions of ethical challenges in higher education and SoTL (23, 24)

Finally, we believe ethics is an intrinsic feature of SoTL, bridging the gap between formal ethical requirements and scholars' internal moral motivations. Our theoretical justification was grounded in the understanding that educational practices are inherently normative. The defining characteristics of SoTL describe not only scholarly practices but also the values that guide professional judgment and educational decision-making. In this study, directed qualitative content analysis was therefore employed

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Table 5. Cont

Sample Participant Quotations	Sample Extracted Codes	Extracted Subcategories (Subdimensions)	Extracted Main Categories (Dimensions)	Pre- determined Categories
Participant 16: "*Is there really a need, or how much is there a need, for nursing students to be familiar with ethical and professional concepts?" "I reviewed several curricula from different countries to answer this question*."	Informed consent - Voluntary participation - Preservation of stakeholders' dignity - Respect for stakeholders – Confidentiality - Accountability to stakeholders - Respect for students' rights	Ethically grounded commitment to addressing stakeholders' needs comprehensively	8 Contextual Responsibility	Context-oriented
	Transparency in institutional interactions - Adherence to regulations - Respect for the institutional mission - Oversight of policy implementation - Professional division of responsibilities within organizational structures to enhance research quality - Professional and constructive interaction	Accountability and professional engagement within the organizational context		
	Alignment with community needs - Respect for community limitations - Respect for community needs - Responsiveness to society - Respect for the societal context - Avoidance of imposing personal frameworks - Ethical alignment with contextual needs - Respect for professional needs	Social accountability and respect for the societal context		
Participant 8: "*One of the strengths of scholarship is that it naturally leads to team-based learning. ... which means everyone needs to be at a similar level of ability, knowledge, and skill, and all should be aligned in pursuing that same goal*."	Ethical commitment to enhancing student learning - Honesty and accountability in the development of individual mastery - Compassion in improving educational conditions - Transparent and committed learning	Ethical commitment to scholarship in the service of enhancing learning	9 Ethical Commitment to Learning	Learning focused
	Focus on improving the learning experience by using student feedback to refine teaching methods - Attention to students' learning capacity - Flexibility in teaching - Commitment to honest learning.	Commitment to optimizing student learning		
Participant 13: "*There is always discussion about the funds that the system pays to the university for a certain process, especially when it cannot be implemented. For example, a lot of money is spent on gamification; it costs money, but it is not counted*."	Adherence to the ethical principles of transparency and justice in collaboration - Transparent and fair agreement on the distribution of credit - Equitable distribution of team responsibilities - Commitment to fairness in assessing students' performance in scholarship - Utilization of expert consultation - Respect for the expertise of other disciplines - Formation of an equitable interdisciplinary team - Fair interdisciplinary collaboration - Informed disciplinary participation - Fairness in actions	Justice and transparency in collaboration and the distribution of responsibilities	10 Ethical Fairness in Scholarly Professional Practice	--
	Justice and fairness in the delivery of educational content - Justice in public access - Fairness in dissemination - Equitable content design - Maintaining boundaries between personal viewpoints and professional requirements in content design - Responsible and conflict-free problem resolution	Accountability in addressing structural challenges and educational justice		
	Responsible use of resources - Justice in resource allocation - Justice in public access	Justice and accountability in the allocation and use of resources		

to interpret the latent ethical meanings embedded within the established SoTL characteristics.

Limitations of the study

The study is conducted in one context and to conduct similar studies in various contexts is recommended. Moreover, we had difficulty in accessing participants due to their hectic schedules. There is a potential conformity bias due to the positive attitudes of the experts towards SoTL.

Suggestions for future research

- Measuring and evaluating the impact of ethical considerations on SoTL performance may help strengthen and further validate the findings of the present study.
- Establishing an ethics standards committee and SoTL community of practice at senior managerial and policy-making levels is recommended to support development, institutionalization, and promotion of ethical practices in this field.

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Table 5. Cont

Sample Participant Quotations	Sample Extracted Codes	Extracted Subcategories (Subdimensions)	Extracted Main Categories (Dimensions)	Pre- determined Categories
Participant 1: "*Working purposefully and looking for something that is dynamic ... Our task was performed 16 times, and changes were constantly made based on the circumstances. Then there was a short pause, and then it was started again, and I know it is still happening at the university*."	Flexibility in the professional design of educational processes - Scholarly analysis of problems to improve educational processes - Moral commitment to the continuity of education - Ethical flexibility in managing change - Ethical responsibility for program sustainability- Moral transparency in process implementation	Ethical and moral commitment to purposeful and sustainable process dynamism	4 Ethical Scholarly Commitment to Dynamic Education	Dynamic process
	Avoidance of misrepresentation or distortion of reality -Flexibility in dynamic design - Responsible improvement of educational conditions - Responsible flexibility - Responsiveness to feedback	Commitment to continuous improvement, advancement, and accountability in scholarship		
Participant 6: "*In the TOSCE we conducted, the audiology group collaborated with our team, and at certain stations, members of the physiotherapy group also joined this interprofessional collaboration*."	Committed identification of needs through disciplinary knowledge -Scholarly allocation of responsibilities based on disciplinary competencies - Adherence to disciplinary standards and principles - Informed design of educational programs grounded in disciplinary knowledge- Committed participation of psychologists and subject-matter experts	Commitment to ethical and professional discipline-based education and scholarship	5 Discipline-oriented: Discipline-oriented scholarly ethical commitment.	Discipline-based
	Professional interaction across specialties for joint projects - Responsible participation of interdisciplinary experts - Emphasis on interdisciplinary - Respect for other disciplines - Professional interdisciplinary collaboration - Valuing disciplinary diversity	Professional and committed interdisciplinary collaboration		
	Transparency in collaborative processes - Clarification of disciplinary roles -Comprehensiveness in ethical analysis - Responsible use of theory	Transparency and comprehensiveness as governing ethical principles of the process		
Participant 5: "*When we search and reach a conclusion, we should certainly be honest in presenting the results and providing our references*."	Ethical commitment to inquiry for the advancement of knowledge -Accuracy and integrity in the process of inquiry -Ethical responsibility in applying inquiry findings	Critical, creative, and ethically grounded inquiry	6 Ethical and Accountable Critical Inquiry	Critical Enquiry Process
	Avoidance of bias in inquiry - Comprehensiveness in inquiry - Comprehensive and unbiased search - Comprehensive and transparent search of sources - Avoidance of disciplinary bias - Ethical commitment to inquiry for identifying problems - Accuracy and integrity in analyzing inquiry data	Honesty, impartiality, and ethical comprehensiveness in inquiry		
	Transparency in identifying sources- Precise differentiation of concepts - Identification of overlapping concepts or titles - Rigor in literature review - Comprehensive and committed review of existing models - Management of conceptual challenges - Active and committed search to respond to needs	Accuracy, transparency, and adherence to evidence in scholarly inquiry		
Participant 15: "As an academic scholar, one of my duties is to make everything I do accessible to others in the best possible way. In other words, I share this as a part of my mission, so that others do not have to reinvent the wheel. Thus, there is no waste of resources, capital, cost, human resources, etc."	Ethical commitment to sharing for the evaluation of goals - Accountability in maintaining alignment with priorities- Ethical commitment to broad and transparent dissemination of reports - Accuracy and integrity in preparing and publishing reports - Responsibility in presenting findings - Fair and equitable access to published information - Transparency in reporting - Honest publication - Honest reporting of limitations - Avoidance of concealing findings - Truthful dissemination - Honest reporting of scope and applicability	Ethical commitment to transparent and honest sharing and reporting	7 Ethical Knowledge Dissemination	Shared Publicly
	Professional dissemination of research findings - Ethical commitment to sharing - Dissemination of preliminary questions - Dissemination of preliminary scholarly ideas - Transparency in information sharing	Professional, responsible, and purposeful dissemination		

• Applying the ethical characteristics of SoTL identified in this study across diverse contexts and disciplines, is suggested to enhance transferability and broader applicability of the findings.

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Table 6. The generated category/dimension through the inductive approach

Emergent Main Category (Dimension)	Subcategory (Subdimension)
Ethical Fairness in Scholarly Professional Practice	Transparency and justice in the distribution of responsibilities, equitable collaboration, educational justice, responsibility in the use of resources, justice in resource allocation

Table 7. Ethics dimension in SoTL: short definitions and practical ethical outcomes

Main Category	Short Definition	Practical Outcomes
Ethical Commitment	Committed collaboration and action with ethical and professional responsibility	Ensuring accountability toward resources, time, and outcomes for stakeholders
Analytical Constructive Ethical Critique	Constructive critique with justice, impartiality, and acceptance of feedback	Reducing resistance and improving quality through fair evaluation
Ethical Scholarly Reflection	Critical reflection with honesty and transparency for professional growth	Facilitating improvement of the educational system through unbiased and open reflection
Ethical Scholarly Commitment to Dynamic Education	Purposeful dynamism with ethical flexibility and continuous improvement	Sustainability of innovative educational processes with observance of ethical principles
Discipline-Oriented Scholarly Ethical Commitment	Commitment to discipline-based education with interdisciplinary collaboration and observance of principles	Effective responsiveness to educational needs based on disciplinary standards
Ethical and Accountable Critical Inquiry	Enquiry conducted with rigor, impartiality, and sufficient evidence	Improvement of knowledge and education through responsible and comprehensive exploration
Ethical Knowledge Dissemination	Transparent and committed dissemination with equitable access	Social responsibility in knowledge dissemination with honesty and impact
Contextual Responsibility	Responsiveness to the needs of stakeholders, the institution, and society with respect for rights	Creating an ethical environment for project implementation with a focus on solving real problems
Ethical Commitment to Learning	Optimization of learning with justice and transparency	Advancement of the scholarly community and student learning through feedback orientation
Ethical Fairness in Scholarly Professional Practice	Justice in the distribution of responsibilities, allocation of resources, and collaboration	Responsible use of resources and fair agreements to prevent waste

• Developing and psychometric validation of an instrument for assessing ethics in SoTL is recommended, as it can assist scholars in the systematic design, implementation, and evaluation of SoTL processes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, ethics in SoTL is defined as adherence to ethical and professional values in the process of scholarship and a commitment to upholding the core characteristics of SoTL. This commitment is manifested through an emphasis on honesty, educational fairness, transparency in scholarly activities, responsibility, designing educational programs aligned with the needs of students, the profession, and society, the conduct of rigorous and evidence-based scholarly actions, fair critique, critical reflection aimed at continuous improvement of the process, active engagement with stakeholders, responsible innovation within constructive and professional standards, commitment to the sharing of knowledge and experience, and the responsible management of all stages of the scholarly process. The findings indicate that ethics in SoTL cannot be reduced merely to adherence to a set of rules and professional requirements; rather, it is constituted through a dynamic interplay between scholars' internal values and commitments (the moral dimension) and the norms and mechanisms of professional and organizational accountability (the ethics dimension). Accordingly, SoTL is inherently and profoundly ethics-oriented, both in its enactment through interactions with learners and faculty members, and in its outcomes and consequences, which extend to educational and academic environments and to society at large.

In addition, rather than proposing a new framework, this study demonstrates that many of the defining characteristics of SoTL implicitly reflect ethical commitments, including responsibility toward learners, scholarly integrity, collaboration, fairness, and social accountability. The merit of this work lies in making these implicit ethical dimensions explicit. Previous SoTL frameworks have primarily focused on describing what constitutes scholarly teaching and learning, whereas our findings illuminate the normative assumptions that underpin these characteristics. This ethical interpretation enriches the theoretical understanding of SoTL by showing that its defining characteristics are not only methodological or scholarly but also value-laden. We provide a foundation for integrating ethical reflection into SoTL practice, faculty development, institutional policy, and future empirical research. Moreover, we illustrate how directed qualitative content analysis can be used to extend the theoretical application of an existing framework by identifying latent ethical dimensions that were not explicitly articulated in the original model.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions

All authors designed the study. FK, FM, and ZS assisted with the review of the articles. FK made the primary contribution to drafting the manuscript. SHB, FM, and SKS, provided their scholarly comments to improve the study, reviewed the manuscript, and provided feedback. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Ethical Considerations

All ethical considerations, including securing informed consent, scheduling interviews, audio-recording and transcription of interviews, while emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation, and ensuring the participants' right to withdraw at any stage, were strictly observed. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the process.

Code of Ethics: This study was a part of a doctoral dissertation for the partial fulfilment of a PhD Degree in medical education. and received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Iran University of Medical Sciences under the code. IR.IUMS.FMD.REC.1400.657.

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Data Availability

The datasets are available upon reasonable request from FK, with due consideration for participant privacy.

AI Use Statement

The authors acknowledge the use of the Grok artificial intelligence-assisted language editing tool (xAI) to improve the clarity and readability of the manuscript in very few cases, and all content has been carefully reviewed and approved by the authors.

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